

“The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men, gang aft a-gley.”

Song of the Squirt,

BY BACILLUS.

(Dedicated without permission to the President and Members of the Sheffield
Medico-Chirurgical Society.)

*Post prandium cum guttâ vini caledonii
carmen sumendum est.*

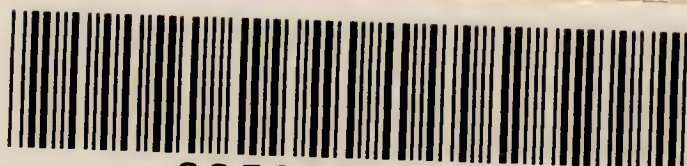
WELLCOME
LIBRARY

pam

WF 200

1891

K 26 S



22501568078

P R E F A C E.

Special Meeting of the Sheffield Medico-Chirurgical Society, held on December 16th, 1890, at the house of Mr. President James.

Present—Several distinguished Members.

Business—An Oyster Supper.

Proceedings were interrupted by the bringing in of a card bearing the name of Mr. Bacillus, and a letter marked “urgent” for the President. As no one would admit any personal acquaintance with the gentleman in question, his repute at the time being peculiarly evil, the President put it to the meeting whether the letter should be read or the police sent for. After some discussion, and an appeal from “advocatus diaboli,” it was decided to give the would-be visitor the benefit of any doubt which might exist, and to read his letter. It ran as follows :—

“ Mr. Bacillus, to the Honourable and Hospitable President of the Sheffield Medico-Chirurgical Society.

“ Glossop Road Flags,

“ December 16th, 1890.

“ Sir,

“ It is necessary to explain my presence, so desirable (for myself) amongst you.

“ I was rudely and violently turned into the street at Berlin, a few nights ago, in front of La Charité Hospital, where I had long been living at peace, as I thought, with all men. Stunned and faint, I lay for some time on the pavement thinking the end of all things was come. At last I was roused from my lethargy by

the pleasant sound of English words close by, and, looking up, I saw the burly form of a brave Scot and the long legs and amiable visage of an Englishman. The gentlemen appeared to have been dining, and were talking merrily of starting for England next day. Just the thing for me! Anywhere out of this horrible Deutschland! So I whipped up the back of the man nearest me, and crept under his coat collar.

“I found another fellow taking refuge in the same retreat. He had a big head, a curly tail, and belonged to a separate, but allied clan, called the ‘Comma’ clan. He followed a somewhat different business, but he, too, had an old grudge against Koch. He had thought it scarcely safe to move about in Berlin, and was merely passing through Germany ‘en route’ for London, where he intended going on board an Indian troopship, hoping to find something to suit his views down on the Eastern coast of the Red Sea. I asked him if there was anything to eat about, and he pointed to some fluff (the remains of a sheep, I believe). It was dry and not toothsome, but we managed to live on it for three days, until we arrived in London. Here Comma got down, and went off to the docks, I think. Anyway, I saw no more of him.

“After a merry night in London, i.e., merry for my patrons—I daren’t come down for fear of being caught—the three of us went to St. Pancras, and I soon reached Sheffield, still under the coat collar and hungry, but full of hope. To my horror, at the last moment I found I had fallen among thieves. As he was quitting the cab, my obliging porter dived into his pocket to see if something, on which he evidently set great store, was safe. What do you think it was? He actually fished out one of those villainous Koch squirts which had caused me and my comrades so much suffering at Berlin!! ‘If that’s your game, I’m off;’ and down I came with a rush, just in time to drop on the step outside as he slammed the front-door to.

“Since then I’ve wandered wearily up and down the doctor’s row, picking up a few precarious crumbs about Haigh’s and

Thompson's. To-night, however, I am in luck, for I have found an invitation to an oyster supper, and from you. Of course it was not intended for me, but I ardently desire to accept it. I saw a dismal, yellow old chap poking around, apparently for an article he had lost, and muttering something about 'spirit being willing but flesh weak.' His flesh looked very weak; not at all up to oysters. So I did not feel called upon to hand back to him the paper I had found. 'Necessitas non habet legem.' I propose coming in his stead, and you will gain by the exchange.

"There is a fundamental law of the universe which says, 'No song, no supper.' Taking the converse as true—for a song, a supper—I am prepared to produce a song.

"If it be deemed a trifle melancholy, and therefore unsuitable for a festive occasion, I beg you to remember the appalling circumstances under which it has been written. It is called the 'Song of the Squirt,' and relates a few passages in my personal history, inclusive of certain recent adventures with a squirt. Should it secure your approval, I hope you will give me a supper; for fluff and husks are not nutritious, and I am desperately hungry.

"I have never been burdened with 'respect of persons,' but with every scrap of that desirable emotion I can muster,

"I am, Mr. President,

"Yours fraternally,

"JEJUNUM BACILLUS."

The impression produced by this letter was not favourable. The meeting, however, decided, after sending a propitiatory message to the honoured Shade of Tom Hood, to admit the applicant—on two grounds, viz., his hunger and his amazing impudence.

Mr. Bacillus was then introduced, and, bowing to the President, read as follows:—

“SONG OF THE SQUIRT.”

—

PART I.

ANTEMORTEM.

[ETIOLOGICAL AND PROGNOSTIC.]

I.

I'm a small and frail Bacillus,
But hail from a mighty host.

A few years ago not a soul did know
From whence we come, nor whither we go,
Nor how we are born, nor how we grow,
Indeed there was then very little to show

Whether we even existed.

But now the round earth with our prowess is ringing,
And Koch, in his pride, a defiance is flinging ;
With poisonous brew he dares to pursue us,
With a sharp little squirt he swears to undo us.
For him and his crew, for me and my peers,
With a boundless faith and very long ears,
Or in cautious suspense, or with low mutter'd jeers,
The doctors and patients, the smiles and the tears
Of learned and simple, the hopes and the fears
Of the whole wide world are enlisted.

II.

I'm a hoary old Bacillus,
And come of an ancient race.

Long before Adam I roamed the earth,
I was in at the death, and watched the birth
Of all that creeps or swims or flies,
No matter their shape, no matter their size.

Would you know my business? That's easy to say,
 There was always some rubbish to clear away,
 And I came to cleanse, to save, to slay,
 As the case might be. But mark, I pray,
 My chief intention, as I'm a sinner,
 Was simply to obtain my dinner.

So when there was plenty of food about,
 And nobody there to turn me out,
 I stayed, and soon invited my chums,
 And then we made merry and filled our "tums,"
 And brought up our babies, and packed the place,
 (For our progeny grows at a fearful pace).

Sometimes our landlord would growl and groan,
 Cough some of us out, and then, with a moan,
 Swear all was in vain, for, whilst he grew thin,
 For one he spat out, a thousand stayed in.
 The silly old muff! Why didn't he try
 To starve us all out, and stop the supply
 Of the rotten old tissues which we lived by?

When all was eaten but shells and bones,
 We buried him deep in the ancient stones,
 Or we sank him down in a marshy loch,
 In those jolly old days when there was no Koch.

We were just a bit scared when Adam came,
 But we soon found out he'd be all the same,
 Or worse—that is, better—from our point of view;
 For he and his children did all they knew
 To ruin their stomachs, their glands and skins,
 And their lungs, by all manner of deadly sins.
 They fought and they feasted, got drunk and went whoring,
 And cursed, as the fire and brimstone came pouring
 To burn up their bodies, corrupted and rotten,
 Crammed full of disease by their vices begotten.

Since then, the history's much the same,
 Most Adamites follow the old bad game ;
 And syphilis, tubercle, cancer, and gout
 Have long ago hunted the rascals out,
 Have ruined their body, and stained their soul,
 Till it's hard to find one who is sound and whole.

All this is 'nuts' to the meek Bacillus;
 With their moribund cells each day we fill us.

We'd grown rather tired of guinea-pig diet,
 Of rabbit, and rat. So one day, on the quiet,
 We ventured our luck on the lord of creation,
 And found we had hit on a capital station.
 We fastened on skin, lung, joint, and gland,
 On the cozy nooks which came to hand,
 And there we revelled, a merry band,
 On tissues and juice, on the fat of the land.
 We were so tiny, and dodgey, and thin,
 There was hardly a place we couldn't get in.

Nobody saw us, no one detected us,
 Years passed by thousands before they suspected us.

I've dined on the monarch, I've dined on the slave,
 I've dined on the merry, and supped on the grave,
 On Roman and Greek, on Gentile and Jew,
 On Mandarin yellow, on humble Hindoo,
 On red men and white, on tawny and black,
 I've eaten them all, the whole sorry pack.
 I pity the young, and the poor, and the good ;
 And, were it not that there'd be scarceness of food
 For our numberless hosts, I'd limit our dinners
 To the useless old tissues of hardened sinners.

III.

I'm a bold and crafty Bacillus,
 Have lived through a world's evolution.
 Does the upstart Koch think *he* can kill us,
 With his squirt and his vile solution ?

You've heard no doubt of that insolent man,
 How he wickedly hatched a treacherous plan,
 To follow us up in our haunts and dens,
 And, armed with an oil-immersion lens,
 To watch us when eating and sleeping and waking,
 When sitting in council, when love we were making,
 Nor thought an apology needed for taking

Such liberties with his betters.

If you doubt what I say, if your head you are shaking,
 Just read up the "Berlin Letters."

He caught a few of our sillier lads,
 He addled their pates with his whimsies and fads ;
 He comb'd them and curl'd them, he fed them, he
 drilled them,

He worm'd out their secrets, he potion'd and pill'd
 them ;

And when they'd become like clay in his hands,
 He lighted his fire and fetched out his pans,
 And tumbled them in, with the strangest things,
 With rattlesnake poison and hornets' stings,
 Toad, newt, spider, bat, and the body and wings
 Of a cruel old vampire who watched the sport,
 But, nodding, went into the wizard's retort ;
 Then he put in crabs' eyes, and the corns of a witch,
 And the heart of a baby found dead in a ditch.
 They simmered and bubbled for six weeks long,
 And when the liquor grew small and strong,
 He bottled it up ; and now, for the flasks,
 Twenty-five marks is the price he asks.

Five hundred injections they're said to contain,
 Five thousand, where weakness, "reaction," or pain
 Bid the doctor desist, lest his patient sustain.
 Worse ills than before. You see it is plain
 The stuff is quite cheap, for you can obtain
 Five squirts for a pfennig ; and this, I maintain,
 Is a price of which no one will ever complain.
 Another point's certain—whatever its uses,
 The stuff owes its power to bacillary juices.

IV.

I'm a jolly old Bacillus,
 And love the doctors dearly.

We're both of one trade, if you could but see it,
 We love the sick body, and both try to free it
 From rubbish which clogs up each tissue and cell,
 And we're both very glad when the patient gets well.
 I don't always cure—but no more do you,
 For if what I am told of your doings be true,
 Your physic and nostrums are chiefly "my eye ;"
 You do your best, doubtless, but still the folks die.
 And why should they not ? Were all to survive,
 You would simply be choked in your big human hive.
 If we play the old game, let's be honest and true,
 I'm seeking my dinner—and so, faith, are you.
 But if ever you aim at becoming philanthropists,
 I'm with you. Bacilli were never misanthropists.

Cleanse the slums, shut the "pubs," stop the smoke, clear
 the air
 And the water, of all the foul things which they bear ;
 Give food to the poor and good clothing to wear ;
 Shut up the wild lads who turn night into day,
 Save the poor wretched women who lead them astray.

And, for God's sake, stop half of those senseless marriages,
 With their rickety brats, and endless miscarriages.
 When your race has grown strong and healthy and fair,
 Rely on my word, you'll not find our folks there.
 When struma and syphilis, cancer and gout,
 By cleanlier living have all been driven out ;
 When lechery's over, carousing and riot,
 We'll go back, and gaily, to guinea-pig diet.

There are lots of good things, besides man, on the earth,
 With fish, flesh, and fowl, no danger of dearth.
 Not to reckon those Oysters—an excellent dish,
 A sort of a cross 'twixt a snail and a fish,
 Found out long ago by my friend, the Bacterium,
 And mentioned to me and the great Megatherium.

V.

I'm a troublesome Bacillus.

And if you attempt to hurry me out
 With that villainous stuff they're hawking about ;
 If you tickle my tail with that damnable squirt,
 There's someone, not me, who's sure to be hurt.
 If you poison my food, of course, out I must go,
 Somewhat shaken, maybe, but still quite so-so ;
 As far as is known, it may very well be
 That I shall come forth, yet frisky and free.
 At the worst, like old Samson, in bygone years,
 I'll bring down your houses about your ears.

Can't you fancy a man's in an awkward fix,
 With coma, and heat at a hundred and six ?
 Or, think you, of comfort and joy there's a store,
 Should the " clinical " mark but a hundred and four ?

Koch says, when we're gone, he'll clean up the place,
 He'll patch the cracked walls, and paint up their face.

Did he never yet list to that wondrous tale
 Of a devil turned out, who did not fail
 To return, with seven others, of worse degree,
 With evil intent and fiendish glee,
 To the place which was "empty, swept, and garnished,"
 And how they trooped in, and how they furnished?

On the whole, you had better just leave us alone ;
 We shall do our own work. See that your's is done.
 Tell Pasteur and Koch, or whoever they be,
 Their venom and squirts are all fiddle-de-dee,
 For they've not seen the last of my rodlets and me.

I'm a very wroth Bacillus.

The song was voted sufficient, and the supper took its course, Mr. Bacillus being invited to renew his acquaintance with oysters and porter.

* * * * *

Twelve months later, being then on his travels, he sent the following impertinent ditty to his former hosts —

*To W. F. Favell, Esq., J.P., the Honble. President for the
present year, 1891-2.*

“SONG OF THE SQUIRT.”

—

PART II.

POSTMORTEM.

[BAFFLED THERAPEUTICS.]

May it please your Honour,

I.

I am still a live Bacillus,
Though now it is twelve months later ; for they’ve reckoned
up what they have done,
And they’ve found that the sick have suffered by their
scientific fun.

They’ve tried their stuff on lupus, on scrofulous lungs
and joints,

And they’ve done their best to poop us, with the nasty
little points

Of the villainous syringes they poked deep under the skin,
Regardless of the twinges, as they shoved through thick and
thin,

Or tough, or young and tender ; if only they might win,
And force us to surrender the parts that we lived in.

“Aye, Sir, there’s been a sair greetin, for mony wha hoped
hae deed,

“We’ve no had the best o’ the fechtin. That Koch an’ his
chiels hae leed.”

The fools ! As though it mattered a jot,
Though we were gone, if the rottenness not.

II.

The craze spread over the kingdom, it reached even Sheffield
at last,

And the doctors there assembled, and they chose out two of
their best.

One was a burly Scotchman, the other was Yorkshire and thin,
And they lined their pockets duly, and sent them off to
Berlin,

To learn the tricks and touches, and see how the thing was
done,

How much there might be true of it, how much was German
fun.

They came back full of wisdom, and full of Rhenish wine,
Through syringing of patients, through knowing how to dine.

The canny Scot was cautious, and shook his clever
head,

“It’s no sae vera sure, mon ; just bide, an’ hear it read.

“See, here’s the wee bit squirt, mon, the charts an’
tubes an’ a’,

“An’ here’s the heed o’ Koch hissel, to glower doon on
ye a’ ;

“But net ae drap o’ lymph, mon, could we steal or hae
for fee,

“They’ll brew ’t as fast as they can, mon ; ye’ll get it
afore ye dee.”

’Twas read in full assembly, by the Yorkshire Brother dear,
Was voted most “resembly,” and lauded far and near,
And printed in the papers, and scattered through the town,
To prove how doctors guarded its health and fair renown.
Then, not to be behindhand, on philanthropic grounds,
The Board of the Infirmary voted a hundred pounds,

—Likewise the Public Hospital—to buy immersion lenses,
Tuberculine, et cet'ra. In one of those fine frenzies
Which seize on men at times, and, mostly when the sense
Of duty can be satisfied at other folks' expense.

At last they got the poison, and quick, out came the tools,
And then they pricked and squirted, like all the other
fools.

They nearly fought about it, which man should be the
first,

And though a trifle funky, each leech did all he durst.
The patients, too, were trembling, and some were very ill,
But Honorary Staff men were blythe and sanguine still ;
Above all, antiseptic. To keep dilutions pure,
They mixed them with carbolic, that acid sweet and
sure.

And when the sick, in faction, cried out of heat and
pain,

They called it fine “reaction,” and did it o'er again.
And some, with childlike wisdom, proclaimed the quaint
belief,

They'd catch the bad Bacillus, just like a common thief.
Said others, cunning in comparison,
“We'll poison their victuals, and starve the whole garri-
son.”

III.

Whilst Sheffielders played at this neat little game,
Throughout the world doctors were doing the same.
The knights of the squirt waxed brazen and bold,
A banner of triumph they soon did unfold,
(You hardly would credit the lies which they told).
The journals were full of their prowess and paces,
As each vied with all, in his long roll of cases.

And meetings were crowded to hear their fine phrases ;
 What cures they had wrought ; how they'd toiled
 through the mazes
 Of subtle induction, to find the right dose,
 (Not so easy a matter as you might suppose) ;
 And how, give them time, they fully expected
 To root out the plague, wherever detected.

IV.

As to Koch—he was worshipped, and covered with gold,
 By peoples and kings ; though, as I am told,
 The French hadn't faith in the science teutonic ;
 They scoffed at the lymph ; cried, with humour sardonic,
 “ Keep the stuff for yourselves ; your civility's vain ;
 “ What we'll take from such rogues is—Alsace and
 Lorraine.”

And Koch himself was, it was said, all a-tremble
 With wrath and vexation he scarce could dissemble.

“ The strength of my brew is by no means quite steady ;
 “ You've stolen it from me before it was ready.
 “ I am not at all clear about what it will do,
 “ It may fail, or may kill, and—Be dam-ned to you.”

Then he dived out of sight in his dark wizard's den ;
 He may come out alive ; but no one knows when.

V.

At last a dread whisper was heard through the state ;
 Some had died by the squirt : some had met the old fate
 Which ends up a phthisis. 'Twas no use denying,
 If not yet quite dead, they were nearly all dying.
 E'en though, for a time, some thought themselves mended,
 'Twas on a delusion they fondly depended ;

For in truth, if the sick a bit better were feeling,
 It wasn't Koch's lymph, it was purely "faith-healing."
 As everyone knows, that deceptive disease,
 So mocking in hopes, so fruitful in fees,
 Will keep a man cheery right on to his end,
 His coffin is waiting, *he*—hoping to mend.

Yet the doctors pricked on : they would not resign
 Their trust in that holy Tuberculine.
 Said Donald, when some began doubting the brew,
 "Bide a wee, it may be, that they've no had eneugh."

VI.

It is true that, with lupus, they got a fair show,
 With the scabs, and the serum all streaming below.
 But then, erysipelas sometimes will act
 In quite the same way. As a matter of fact
 They found out full soon, it was just the old tune,
 They couldn't get on without Volkmann's sharp spoon.
 Then they scraped and they scratched the tuberculous
 tissue,
 Dug channels and holes, hoping thence there would issue
 Bacillary hosts, with their dying and dead.
 (Part of this turned out true, be it candidly said,
 For some of our fellows *would* live where they chose ;
 It was risky close under the enemy's nose).

Thus they dug and they scraped in the joints and the
 glands,
 And some there were found, more venturesome hands,
 Who would dig in the lungs, through a hole in the
 chest,
 And scratch out the rubbish, and heal up the rest
 With lotion boracic, pumped in at the hole,
 To rout the Bacilli, not sparing a soul,

Here and there you might hear a wag, laughing and
 wond'ring,
 How far they would go with their scoops and their
 blund'ring ;
 And Donald, he said, " Hoot, mon, are ye daft ?
 " Ye'll let oot the sma' bit o' life there is left."

Still the phthisical died, the joints wouldn't mend,
 The glands yet did fester. What was worse, in the end,
 The rascally lupus came back in its place,
 And gnawed at the nose, and mapped out the face
 With its ugly red lines, as in sad days of yore,
 And things were soon bad as ever before.
 This was all most depressing, and didn't seem fair,
 So they flocked unto Donald. Quoth he, in despair,
 " There's naebody kens—Ye maun scratch a' the mair."

But the bubble had burst. The last point at issue
 Was whether, as test for tuberculous tissue,
 The lymph was of use. Some said, " Yes; that's decided,"
 But others there were who as stoutly denied it.
 Some held to their faith; most laughed and derided;
 At length, by degrees, the clamour subsided.

VII.

Then Donald, he gathered his Sheffield clan round him,
 There was naught left in physic henceforth to astound
 him.

" Friens, it's no gien tae mortals to ken a' afore 'em,
 " We've a' done oor best; sae noo, wi' decoorum,
 " We'll bury that squirt, in humble thanksgievin',
 " The maist we hae pricked are still 'mangst the leevin';
 " An' aiblins it's best to say nae mair aboot it,
 " I'm thinkin' we'd a' hae been better withoot it.

“ We’ll no waste what’s left o’ the lymph, noo we’re cool,
 “ An’ we’ll mak a last use o’ that sma’ sinfu’ tool,
 “ To poison the rats at the Medical School.
 “ But as to yon beastie, I’m no that gey sure
 “ He’s done a’ the mischief. An’, as to the cure,
 “ ’Twas vera unsicker, an’ noo it’s a’ ended ;
 “ To ken mair than ithers we ne’er hae pretended ;
 “ But whether it cam frae aboon, or the Deil,
 “ Ye maun speer for yoursels. An’ I’ll bid ye
 “ Fareweel.”

VIII.

Yes. You’ve slain us by millions. You’ve not cured your cases.

The lungs are still rotting, and so are the faces.
 What matters our loss ? Half a day will replace it,
 But *your* plague remains : again you must face it.
 Breed less, and breed better ; and give up your vices,
 Your feasting and drink, your sinful devices
 Which weaken your limbs and ruin your vitals,
 And bring on diseases, of all sorts and titles.
 When your tissues are sound you’ll not find us about you,
 Your débris’s not choice, we can do well without you.

But if you persist in finding us dinner,
 We’ll be round again soon, for we’re just a shade thinner.
 The road to your lungs we’ve by no means forgotten,
 We’ll lodge in your skin and your glands, if they’re rotten.
 Sae, here’s tae yer Lordships ! Wha lives langest ’ill see,
 For ye’ve no heard the last o’ my rodlets an’ me.

I’m a hardy Scotch Bacillus.

OWER THE BORDER,
 October, 1891.

Pawson and Brailsford, Printers, Sheffield.